

HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 5: The Early Daoists – Hermits, Shen Dao, and Laozi Section 5: Western vs. Chinese "knowing"

- Western concepts of knowledge nearly always positive
 - Linked to Western belief-desire psychology.
 - Reasoning (thinking) is treated as a process of rehearsing arguments, assessing premises and drawing conclusions.
 - Epistemology largely directed at this model of reasoning and psychology.
 - Believing becomes *knowing* when the belief is true.
 - *Knowing* is knowing a proposition, a truth.
 - S knows P =_{df} 1. S believes P, 2. P is true and 3. S has a sound argument for P.
- In Classical China, psychology works differently
 - 心 *Xīn*^{heart-mind} makes 是非 *shì-fēi*^{this-not that} judgments--辯 *biàn*^{distinctions}.
 - Used in guiding behavior, choosing a path.
 - We assign names to things, placing them in categories relevant to a *dào* of behavior.
- The “10,000 things” are the 10,000 nameable classifications
 - When we assign a name to a thing, we assign it a role in our social 道 *dào*^{path}.
 - We place it in a context where we know how to treat it.
 - If I assign myself the role of 哥哥 *ge ge*^{elder brother} I know how to behave towards the person whom I assign the role of 妹妹 *mei mei*^{little sister}.
- Knowing is doing, assigning, and behaving according to a *dào*.
- Central psychological concept: 為 *wèi*^{deem:treat as}
 - If I treat something as a computer, this guides my behavior towards it.

HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

- It gives it the relevant status for my behavior toward it.
- Similar sounding related term 謂 *wèi*^{call}.
- Also similar sound and related to 偽 *wěi*^{artificial} (adding a human 人 radical)
 - Contrasts with 真 *zhēn*^{genuine}, which is nowadays translated as 'true' as opposed to 'false'.
- Knowledge constitutes the form of behavior taught and learned in a social language
 - Marking them 是 *shì*^{right} and 非 *fēi*^{wrong} signposts which *dào* to follow.
- Doing it reliably and correctly constitutes knowing it.
- This reintroduces the 正名 *zhèng-míng*^{rectify names} problem – how do we identify what is 'correct'?